



Lesson 2

The Imperfect State

Opening Prayer

Introduction

There are many different forms of government. Yet all of them are established by God (cf. Romans 13). Recalling what we learned last time, how could one make the argument that every government is relatively good and evil at the same time?

Psalm 146

- 1 Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD, O my soul.
- 2 I will praise the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.
- 3 Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save.
- 4 When their spirit departs, they return to the ground;
on that very day their plans come to nothing.
- 5 Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God,
- 6 the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them—
the LORD, who remains faithful forever.
- 7 He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry.
The LORD sets prisoners free, ⁸the LORD gives sight to the blind,
the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves the righteous.
- 9 The LORD watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow,
but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.
- 10 The LORD reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the LORD.

1. Why shouldn't we trust in the state and its leaders?
2. Why should we put our trust in God?

3. For whom does the Lord have special concern?
4. What are some ways God provides relief to lowly?
5. The state, which God has instituted, has a dual personality. The state does good work when it protects and provides for its citizens, but the state is an ally of Satan when it works to destroy the faith of God's people. How do the following passages describe the state as an agent of God or an agent of evil?

Ezra 1:1-4 In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing: ²“This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: ‘The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. ³ Anyone of his people among you—may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem. ⁴ And the people of any place where survivors may now be living are to provide him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem.’ ”

Daniel 3 – [The account of the three men in the fiery furnace.]

Luke 2:1, 4-5 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ...⁴ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

Matthew 2:16 When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.

Acts 23:23-24 Then [the commander] called two of his centurions and ordered them, “Get ready a detachment of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at nine tonight. ²⁴ Provide mounts for Paul so that he may be taken safely to Governor Felix.”

Philippians 1:12-14 Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. ¹³ As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. ¹⁴ Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.

6. How was God's agenda (that is, his desire to save us) evident even when governments persecuted the church? Give examples.
7. Can you think of examples of the same in recent history?
8. What are we to do when the authorities order us to do wrong or forbid us to proclaim the gospel?

Acts 5:18-20, 27-29, 40-42 [The high priest and his associates] arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. ¹⁹ But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. ²⁰ "Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people the full message of this new life." ...²⁷ Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. ²⁸ "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood." ²⁹ Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men!" ...⁴⁰ They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. ⁴¹ The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. ⁴² Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.

9. How do the following examples of God's faithful people reinforce the principle of obeying God above all human authorities.
 - Pharaoh orders the midwives to kill all the Israelite boys at birth (Exodus 1).
 - Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were ordered to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's statue or be burned alive (Daniel 3).
 - King Darius makes a law that he alone should be prayed to for the next 30 days (Daniel 6).

- 10.** In all these instances, what is notable about the “civil-disobedience” of believers? (What things *didn't* they do?)
- 11.** Discuss which of the following would fall under the category of the government commanding a Christian to sin or to stop sharing the gospel.
- a) In your role as a public school teacher, you are required to teach evolution or world religions. Can you do this, or should you refuse?
 - b) The state says you must offer your services (like baking a wedding cake) to people regardless of their lifestyles or sexual identification. Can you do this, or should you refuse?
 - c) Your local parent-teacher organization wants your public school to begin its day with prayer. On which side of the fence would you fall?
 - d) You are an official in the government office charged with issuing wedding licenses. A gay couple comes to you for a license. Should you oblige or refuse to provide the license?
- 12.** Is the United States a Christian nation? Explain your answer.
- 13.** There is a deep divide in our political discourse today. We are subjected to false information, exaggerations, and angry rhetoric. What will guide a Christian’s actions and speech in regard to political discourse? What are the dangers of social media?